

Development Services Department Cost Controls and Efficiency Measures

Development-related programs administered by eight different Departments were merged into a single Development Services Department. These programs were placed in a fee-for-service fund and the General Fund subsidy for those services was eliminated. This saved the General Fund an estimated cumulative total of \$16.4 million dollars since 1996. This is an average annual savings of \$2.05 million.

Significant automation improvements were also implemented. Over 633 desktop computers are installed and maintained on the Department's local area network. This has improved staff work quality, communications, and productivity. The first phase of the Department's project tracking system has been implemented Department-wide, allowing staff to manage a customer's discretionary project review from submittal to approval. The remaining phases of the project tracking system will be implemented over the next several months and will allow all development projects to be tracked and managed. The Department's geographic information system, "Cabrillo", has also been enhanced to include more than 100 data layers such as the coastal overlay zone, flight activity zones, geologic hazard zones, storm water runoff sensitivity areas and other information that is now available on each staff desktop computer. These layers are also provided to the San Diego Geographic Information Source (SANGIS) who makes them available to the public. The Department's web page currently receives more than 8,125 "visits" per month. The web page also provides for E-permitting (2,700 per year), application forms, access to the entire text of the land development code, zoning information services by e-mail, and up-to-date plan check status for all building permit applicants. In addition to those mentioned above, an interactive voice response (IVR) system has been installed for the convenient, automated scheduling of construction inspections. Sixty-five percent of the 180,000 inspections provided annually by the Department are scheduled by using this touch-tone phone automated system. Combined, these systems and improvements help reduce the labor hours required to provide services, improve staff work quality, enhance communication, improve productivity, and provide better service to the customer.

Legacy automation systems that were redundant (such as the Customer Service Scheduling System) have been discontinued resulting in a \$48,000 annual savings. In addition, the Building Permit Information System (BPIS) that was created in the early 1980s will be replaced in 2003. BPIS tracked only building permits and provided a limited amount of management and tracking functionality. The new Project Tracking System (PTS) tracks all permits (fire, building, engineering, planning, etc.) necessary for the entire project from concept to completion. This will save the Department an estimated \$148,000 per year beginning in fiscal year 2004. This system will also be the basis for web-enabled services to allow customers to access the status of their project review.

Other customer improvements include permit by Fax and mail (3,482 per year average) that allow us to reduce customer trips downtown and increase staff efficiency. The

Guaranteed Second Opinion program encourages customers to elevate conflicts or questions early and help control or reduce project resubmittals. Working with the LU&H Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) we have also developed project plan templates. These help customers organize their project plans to place the project information in the same location on each plan. Staff review time is reduced by providing information in a “quick check” format. The Department also consolidated project submittal staff and requirements to standardize the process, better utilize staff resources, and streamline the submittal process. Another enhanced customer service that has been added during this period is engineering self-certification. This allows customers for certain project types to have their engineer self-certify that the project complies with City regulations and thus reduces staff review of the project. The engineer is also required to inspect the project and certify that it was constructed in accordance with City regulations and standards. Voluntary self-certification programs are also being developed in conjunction with the TAC for landscape architectural and architectural reviews. Lastly, development records have been consolidated from several different locations onto the second floor of the Development Services Center.